

# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

## DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

### NEWS RELEASE



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Date Issued: 5/23/2013

#### **2013 Yukon River Summer Salmon Fishery News Release # 3**

#### **Summer Announcement #3, Lower Yukon Summer Chum Salmon Commercial Outlook**

Districts Affected: Lower Yukon Area

The preseason outlook for the 2013 summer chum salmon run is estimated to be 1.5 to 1.8 million fish and is anticipated to provide for escapement, a normal subsistence harvest, and a commercially harvestable surplus range of 500,000 to 800,000 fish. Similar to the last several years, the ability to capitalize on the available surplus for commercial purposes will be affected by management actions taken to conserve Chinook salmon, which are incidentally harvested in chum salmon directed fisheries. If a surplus of summer chum salmon is identified above escapement and subsistence needs, there may be directed summer chum salmon commercial fishing in Districts 1 and 2. It is unlikely there will be a buyer in District 3.

Under new regulations adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) in 2013, the department may by emergency order authority allow the use of dip nets, beach seines, and gillnets of 5 ½-inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 30 meshes in depth as commercial gear. These new gear options are intended to allow for additional summer chum directed commercial fishing opportunity while reducing the incidental harvest of Chinook salmon.

Dip nets and beach seines could be employed to allow for the commercial harvest of summer chum even during times when subsistence fishing closures have been enacted to protect Chinook salmon. Fishermen employing dip nets or beach seine gear are required to immediately release incidentally caught Chinook salmon back to the water alive. In the event that a Chinook salmon is killed by these gear types, the dead Chinook salmon must be recorded on a fish ticket and forfeited to the state. The department plans to coordinate meetings with commercial fishermen and the local processor in early June to discuss these new gear types and will work closely with them to monitor their use. Fishermen interested in using these new gear types are encouraged to contact the processor for more information regarding gear availability and meeting schedules.

As in recent years, commercial opportunity using gillnets will likely be delayed until after the midpoint or later of the Chinook salmon run in order to minimize the incidental harvest of Chinook salmon. The potential for incidental harvest of Chinook salmon will be investigated on a daily basis

using test fishing indices, sonar passage estimates, and travel time information. It is likely initially, gillnets will be restricted to 5 ½-inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 30 meshes in depth. It is anticipated that incidental harvest of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon should be minimized after the third quarter point of the run, as fewer Canadian bound Chinook salmon are present in the lower Yukon River. During this timeframe, a transition to the more traditional, 6-inch or smaller mesh size restriction would likely occur to target summer chum salmon. Participation is expected to increase during these periods. As a reminder, in Districts 1–3 regulations stipulate that gillnets with mesh size of 6 inches or less may not be more than 50 meshes in depth.

The sale of incidentally caught Chinook salmon in chum salmon directed commercial fishing will be prohibited. Therefore, fishermen can release live Chinook salmon or use them for subsistence purposes. Fishing periods with gillnets will likely be 4 to 12 hours in duration.

Typically, in Districts 1–3 during the summer commercial salmon fishing season, subsistence salmon fishing closes by regulation 18 hours before, during, and 12 hours following a commercial salmon fishing period. However, the department may by emergency order authority allow commercial and subsistence fishing to occur concurrently to provide commercial fishing opportunity directed at summer chum salmon. The two harvest events, normally separated by a closure, can effectively be compressed into a single event and reduce the overall amount of time the Chinook salmon run is exposed to harvest pressure.

The department will continue to try to minimize the incidental harvest of Chinook salmon in the summer chum directed fishery and may limit the area open to commercial fishing to only portions of the districts in which the incidental harvest rate could be anticipated to be low. This determination is primarily based on test fishing indices, sonar passage estimates, and an understanding of travel time. In the early portion of the run, it is common to see Chinook salmon entering the river through primarily the South Mouth. As the season progresses this entry pattern shifts as more Chinook salmon enter the river in the Middle and North Mouths. In recent years this pattern has been very pronounced, as very few Chinook salmon have been entering South Mouth during late June. In recent years the department has opened a South Mouth only fishing area to take advantage of times of high abundance of summer chum salmon and low abundance of Chinook salmon (Figure 1). In District 2, it becomes more difficult to use entry pattern information to limit areas to reduce incidental harvest, as Chinook salmon that have entered each of the mouths are present. Limited area openings in District 2 are largely based on travel time information.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please call the Anchorage ADF&G office at 907-267-2217.

This has been an announcement by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

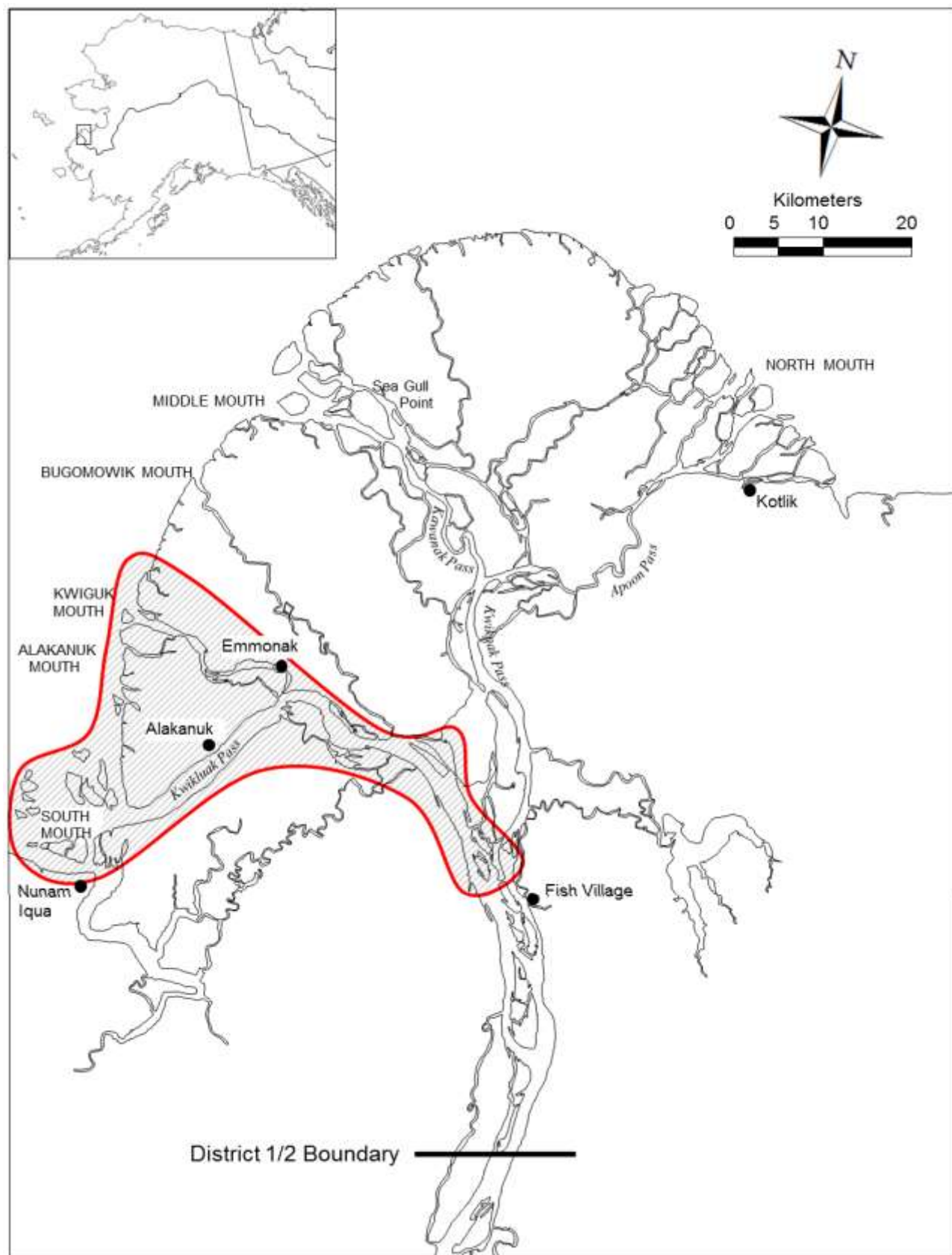


Figure 1. Map showing area open to commercial fishing during South Mouth only openings (includes shaded area and Black River waters).